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RUQMBE/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT NIACT IMMEDIATE 0482

RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM NIACT IMMEDIATE 3636

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WHCA, PASS SECSTATE

JERUSALEM FOR HABIB

E. O. 12065: RDS-1,3 6/11/02 (PAGANELLI, ROBERT P.) OR-M

TAGS: PEPR, MILI, MOPS, IS, LE, SY, US

SUBJECT: SYRIAN ACCEPTANCE OF CEASEFIRE IN LEBANON -

- INITIAL PERSPECTIVES FROM DAMASCUS

1. S - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. PRESIDENT ASSAD'S RAPID ACCEPTANCE OF A CEASEFIRE IN LEBANON, WHICH TOOK PLACE WITHOUT ANY ADDITIONAL REPRE-

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State Dept. review completed

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SENTATIONS FROM US FOLLOWING HABIB'S LATE NIGHT MEETING WITH HIM JUNE 10, IS A TRIBUTE TO PIL HABIB'S SKILLFUL HANDLING OF THE SYRIANS OVER THE PAST TWO DAYS. ASSAD HAS ACCEPTED THE CEASEFIRE ON THE BASIS OF SYRIA'S "PRINCIPLED STAND" AS HE TERMS IT, BUT IN SO DOING HAS PUT THE USG IN THE POSITION OF HAVING TO DELIVER ON THE US POLICY LINE WHICH HABIB CONSTANTLY EMPHASIZED DURING HIS DISCUSSIONS HERE, NAMELY EVENTUAL FULL ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL FROM LEBANON WITH FINAL PULLBACK SUBJECT TO AGREED ARRANGEMENTS ON SECURITY AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS AFFECTING ISRAEL. IT IS NO HAPPENSTANCE THAT SARG'S ACCEPTANCE ANNOUNCEMENT IS PUBLICLY TIED TO HABIB-ASSAD DISCUSSIONS.

3. IT HAS BEEN EVIDENT THROUGHOUT OUR CONVERSATIONS DURING THE PAST TWO DAYS THAT ASSAD WANTED A CEASEFIRE. SYRIA'S MILITARY LOSSES WERE OBVIOUSLY AN IMPORTANT FACTOR. AT THE SAME TIME IT WAS ALSO CLEARLY DEMONSTRATED BY ACTIONS ON THE GROUND THAT HE IS WILLING TO COMMIT SIGNIFICANT FORCES --AS WELL AS SUFFER SIGNIFICANT LOSSES-- IN ORDER TO PRESERVE SYRIA'S POSITION IN LEBANON, AND SYRIA'S ARAB IMAGE, AND TO TRY TO HALT THE ISRAELI ADVANCE. THIS HAS CARRIED WITH IT THE CLEAR AND INCREASING DANGER OF ESCALATION INTO A MAJOR SYRIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT. IN OTHER WORDS, ASSAD HAS A BOTTOM LINE AND HE CAN ONLY BE PUSHED SO FAR. WHEN CORNERED, ASSAD WILL FIGHT.

4. THERE ARE TWO IMMEDIATE CONCERNS THAT ARE APPARENT TO US CONCERNING INITIAL OBSERVANCE AND STABILITY OF THE CEASEFIRE. THE FIRST POINT IS THE ISRAELI STIPULATION IN THEIR CEASEFIRE STATEMENT THAT REINTRODUCTION OF SAM MISSILES INTO THE BIGA' BY SYRIA WOULD LEAD TO AN IMMEDIATE ISRAELI REACTION AND DESTRUCTION OF THE MISSILES. BASED ON OUR DISCUSSION LATE LAST NIGHT WITH ASSAD, THERE MAY BE SOME SYRIAN RESTRAINT ON THIS POINT. ASSAD TOLD HABIB THAT SYRIA HAD NOT FULLY REPLACED THOSE MISSILE SITES DESTROYED BY ISRAEL IN THE JUNE 9 AIR RAID ON THE BIGA' ALTHOUGH HE SAID THAT FAILING TO DO SO WAS FOR "LOGISTICAL REASONS." WE THINK THERE MAY BE MORE TO HIS RESTRAINT THAN LOGISTICS, SINCE HE ALSO STATED AT THE SAME TIME THAT SYRIA HAD NOT SENT SIGNIFICANT REINFORCEMENTS INTO LEBANON IN THE PAST 24 HOURS EVEN THOUGH

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ISRAEL HAD DONE SO.

5. ASSAD SAID THAT REINFORCEMENTS HAD NOT BEEN SENT INTO LEBANON BECAUSE SYRIA'S LINES OF COMMUNICATIONS AND SUPPLY WERE RELATIVELY SHORT AND ADDITIONAL REINFORCEMENTS COULD BE SENT IN A SHORT TIME. WHILE THIS IS ONE ELEMENT IN ASSAD'S THINKING, WE BELIEVE THAT ANOTHER CONSIDERATION IS HIS CONCERN FOR THE DEFENSE OF SYRIA PROPER AND ESPECIALLY THE DAMASCUS/GOLAN HEIGHTS AREA. THIS IS BORNE OUT BY YESTERDAY'S DEPLOYMENT OF SYRIA'S RESERVE 3RD ARMORED DIVISION TO AN AREA TEN MILES WEST OF DAMASCUS. THIS PUTS THE 3RD DIVISION IN THE POSITION TO BE MOVED RAPIDLY AS CIRCUMSTANCES REQUIRE EITHER TOWARDS THE GOLAN OR INTO LEBANON.

6. THIS ARGUES THAT SYRIA WILL EXERCISE RESTRAINT IN AUGMENTING ITS FORCES IN LEBANON, AS ASSAD HAD IMPLIED TO US LAST NIGHT. WE THINK THE SAME MIGHT BE TRUE CONCERNING REINTRODUCTION OF MISSILES INTO THE BIGA' AND THEREFORE RECOMMEND THAT WE NOT REPEAT NOT BELABOR THE SYRIANS ON THIS PARTICULAR POINT AT THIS TIME. HABIB REINFORCED TO ASSAD SEVERAL TIMES DURING OUR DISCUSSIONS THAT THE MISSILES IN THE BIGA' ARE A FLASHPOINT. ISRAELI AIR STRIKES ON THE SITES HAVE REINFORCED THE POINT. A TONING DOWN OF ISRAELI RHETORIC WOULD ALSO BE HELPFUL. PUBLIC CHALLENGES ARE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE. ASSAD HAS ALREADY HEARD THE ISRAELIS AND THE US LOUD AND CLEAR ON THE SUBJECT.

7. OTHER MAJOR CONCERN INsofar AS INITIAL SYRIAN OBSERVANCE OF CEASEFIRE GOES IS ISRAELI INTENTIONS VIS-A-VIS THE PLO IN BEIRUT AND ELSEWHERE. WE NOTE THAT DEFMIN EXDIS

SHARON, IN A NEWS CONFERENCE JUST BROADCAST BY RADIO ISRAEL, HAS SAID THERE WILL BE NO CEASEFIRE WITH THE PLO. IF THIS IS FOLLOWED UP BY ISRAELI MILITARY ACTIONS AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS, INCLUDING AIR AND NAVAL BOMBARDMENTS AGAINST BEIRUT AND ELSEWHERE, THE CEASEFIRE COULD BE SERIOUSLY THREATENED IN ITS INFANCY.

8. ~~COMMENT~~ ASSAD'S RAPID ACCEPTANCE OF CEASEFIRE REMINDS US THAT HE IS PREPARED TO ACT POSITIVELY IN A

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CRUNCH IN US INTERESTS TERMS WHEN THE INTERESTS ARE
CLEARLY MUTUAL. AS IN THE DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT DAYS OF
1973-74, ASSAD IS PREPARED TO RECOGNIZE HE MUST LOOK TO THE
- US AS THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE WHEN FACED BY OVERWHELMING
ISRAELI POWER. ~~USING TOO MANY ILLUSIONS, WE~~
~~SHOULD BE ALERT TO EXPLOIT THE PRESENT SITUATION AS A~~
~~WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE US-SYRIAN RELATIONS, KEEP-~~
ING THIS CLEARLY IN MIND AS WE PROCEED TO SOLIDIFY THE
CEASEFIRE AND EFFECT AN ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL, AND AS WE
GO ON TO RETACKLE THE TOTALITY OF THE LEBANESE PROBLEM
AND MID EAST PEACE PROCESS. PAGANELLI

END OF MESSAGE SECRET